

Remarks on the 75th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage in Jackson Hole,
Wyoming
August 26, 1995

Thank you very much. Thank you very much, I think, Hillary. *[Laughter]* In my own defense, I brought these boots home about 10 years ago, and the shine has kind of come off of them now. *[Laughter]* They don't wake anybody at night anymore.

I want to thank Rosemary Shockley and all the representatives and guests of the women's organizations who are here who put this wonderful event together. I want to thank the wonderful people who work for the Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks for making this an incredible vacation for our family. We have had a wonderful couple of days.

Yesterday we were up in Yellowstone, and I remarked that I had had a lot of incredible things happen to me in my life, but in spite of that, if anybody had ever told me that within the space of about 8 minutes I would be feeding bison to wolves and then would be hailed on in August—*[laughter]*—or as one of the park rangers said, this is “hail on the Chief”—*[laughter]*—I would never have believed it. So this has been an incredible thing for me, and I'm so profoundly grateful to everybody here in Wyoming who has made our vacation so wonderful.

I'm glad to be here for this occasion. I was thinking how amazing it is that a State like Wyoming would be the first place, the first democracy anywhere in the world to give women the right to vote. And maybe it was because the men were more secure here than they were other places at the time. *[Laughter]* But for whatever reason, it was a very good thing.

I have always been interested in these issues because, as Hillary said, I was born to a working mother in the 1940's and raised by a working grandmother in the 1940's. So my mother and my grandmother were both working 50 years or so ago, just 25 years after women were given the right to vote in the country as a whole.

I'd like to say a word, if I might, at the beginning about this world conference on women. I'm glad the First Lady is going to lead our delegation. And you heard her describe the delegation. They come from all walks of life, from different political parties and religions, and they disagree about a lot of things. But

they do agree that if you look at the world and imagine what the future is going to be like and if you believe as I do that more and more the fate of Americans—even in landlocked States like Wyoming and Arkansas, where I grew up and lived until I became President—will be caught up in the fate of what happens to people all around the world, we must have a common agreement that we need a united front for treating women all over the world with dignity and respect and giving them opportunities in the family and education and in the workplace.

We can't imagine what it's like in America because of the progress being made in this country by women, but there are still places where women babies are more likely to be—little girl babies are more likely to be killed just because they are little girls. There are countries in the world today that have a huge imbalance in the number of males and females because the little girls are killed at birth because they're not thought to have sufficient value.

There are still countries in the world that try to force women not to have children, and that's something we can't imagine in this country, where that's the most profound right that women have in the family. There are still countries in the world where a young bride can be burned if her family can't come up with the dowry or won't come up with a little more. There are still places in the world that are held in abject poverty because women who are entrepreneurial and creative and willing to work don't have a chance even to borrow what would be a pittance in America to start a little business to ply their trades and work their skills.

And all of this will affect us because we're going to live in a global economy. And if we want to trade with the rest of the world and promote democracy and freedom with the rest of the world, then, obviously, we need to be working with people who are trying to unleash the potential of every citizen in their country. And we believe that's the only thing that works here in America.

One of the most troubling things to me about our politics today in America is that everything gets turned into just another version of the same

old political fight, and all these issues seem to be torn like Silly Putty into extremes. So now there's this huge effort in America to try to convince the American people that this conference is somehow anti-family and that we're sending some sort of radical delegation there. Why? Not because it's true, but because it furthers the almost addictive, almost narcotic drive among some elements in our society to take every single issue and use it as a cause for division among our people when we need to be more united.

This conference is going to talk about education and domestic violence and grassroots economics, employment, health care, political participation. It's going to talk about a lot of things we take for granted here in this country that we think if everybody had access to it around the world we'd be a lot better off. And however anyone might try to paint this conference, the truth is it is true-blue to families, to supporting them, to conserving them, to valuing them.

And I want you to know that I think America will have some things to learn from this conference as well. And we don't intend to walk away from it when it's over. I'm going to establish an interagency council on women to make sure that all the effort and the good ideas actually get implemented when we come back home.

I have declared this day Women's Equality Day because there is so much to celebrate and so much still to do. All around the country, as I'm sure you know, there are events commemorating this important anniversary, but no place has a better claim to it than Wyoming, for all the reasons that Hillary said.

The suffragists left us a living legacy and a continuing challenge. The legacy is full citizenship for our mothers, our sisters, our daughters. The continuing challenge is to honor that legacy by using these privileges to lead our Nation in the right direction.

The vote for women came at the end of an enormous philosophical war. Some of the things said kind of remind me about what people are saying about this conference on women now. It was bloodless, but it was highly costly. It literally consumed the lives of thousands of American women who were dedicated to gaining the right to vote. The dividends that were won we are still reaping today.

But remember what the opponents said about that. The opponents said that allowing women the vote would mean a disaster for our Nation;

it would destroy our families; it would end all distinctions between the sexes. [Laughter] Happily, they were wrong on all counts. [Laughter] But the arguments then and the arguments you hear about this conference on women today, they illustrate one of Clinton's laws of politics, which is that the American people have one peculiarity: they're all for change in general, but a lot of them are against it in particular. [Laughter]

I remember back in 1993 when I was trying to get Congress to enact my deficit reduction program that would also have lowered taxes on working families with children and increased our investment in education and technology, and the people who wouldn't vote for it said it would mean the end of the American economy. It would bring on a great recession. It would just be a disaster. It would be the end of everything good and true about America. A bunch of those folks are running for President today. [Laughter]

So it turned out that the results of that program were that we reduced the deficit from \$290 billion to \$160 billion. We got about halfway home toward our goal of balancing the budget before anything is done this year. We got 7 million new jobs, 2½ million new homeowners, 1½ million new small businesses, the largest number in American history, the stock market at 4,700, and things are rocking along pretty good. And they still say it was just the worst thing that ever happened. Everybody is for change in general, but it's difficult to get people to do the particular things to achieve those changes. I think that's important to remember.

Somehow, by some magic of harmony with this beautiful nature behind me and a sense of self-confidence and fairness, men who were in the decisionmaking process in Wyoming found the self-confidence and the innate fairness, without regard to their other partisan or philosophical differences, to say it doesn't make sense to have half our folks not have the right to vote. And that's a great tribute to the people of Wyoming. It led directly to the passage of the 19th amendment, without which none of these other things would have happened.

And of course, as Hillary already said as she introduced the survivors here of that remarkable slate of women who swept the elections in Jackson in 1920—I thought that was an incredible thing, and I liked it a lot until I read that one of the women actually defeated her own

husband. [Laughter] Those guys have even more self-confidence than I do when it came to that. [Laughter]

If you think about it, it's interesting, women have always had great symbolic importance in our country's democracy. Our greatest symbols for justice and liberty are women. Think about it, a woman holding the scales of justice, blindfolded; the Statue of Liberty holding a torch. One promises fairness; the other, freedom.

We are a country that, more than anything else, is still around after all this time because we kept expanding the boundaries of fairness and freedom, because we never listened to not only the naysayers among us but also the naysayers in our own spirits, for each of us, inside, every day wakes up with the scales balanced between hope and fear. And somehow we've always found the magic balance to go forward for fairness and freedom.

Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Esther Morris, Carrie Chapman Catt, they helped to achieve that. Mother Jones fought to end child labor. Sojourner Truth fought to end discrimination and to establish social justice. My friend Rosa Parks set in motion the civil rights movement by simply refusing to sit in the wrong place on a bus. A lot of ordinary women all over this country, decade after decade after decade, have worked to advance the cause of fairness and freedom.

When we look back on them from the vantage point of the present, it's hard to imagine that as recently as 1920 American women couldn't vote. The suffragists had a lot of vision. They knew that the vote would be an opening, a door through which women could help to direct our Government to where it should be and with which women could stand behind issues that would make their families stronger and their children's lives better.

When you look back, it seems remarkable that all this has happened in the last 75 years. Now, more and more women are completing higher and higher levels of education, entering fields which were closed to them not so long ago. Every time I visit a Federal facility, every time I go to these national parks, I marvel at how many of the park rangers are women.

We just celebrated, Hillary and I did, a milestone in the progress to erect a memorial in Washington to the women who are veterans of our wars. And I was so proud to be able to say at this ceremony that in the 2½ years I

have been President, we have opened more than 250,000 positions in the United States military to women that were closed just 2½ years ago.

In the last 3 years, the Small Business Administration in our administration has cut its budget by 40 percent, almost doubled its loan volume, and increased loans to women entrepreneurs by 85 percent. We're not at 50 percent yet, but I have six women in my Cabinet, twice the number of any previous administration, and over one-third of our Presidential appointees and about one-third of the new Federal judges appointed in the last 2½ years are women. Women are beginning to participate more fully throughout this country in the life of America. And so far as I know, the sky is not falling anywhere. [Laughter]

We also have to recognize that the people who were against the right to vote for women were wrong when they said this would abolish all differences between the sexes. And some of the differences that still exist are not such good ones. We know that women are still, in peculiar ways, more vulnerable to violence, and we have established a violence against women section in the Department of Justice which is doing exemplary work. And the former Attorney General of Iowa, Bonnie Campbell, heads that, and she is also going to the women's conference.

We have tried to do a lot of work to see that our national medical research focuses more on the health concerns of women. I was stunned when I started running for President, I never knew before how women had been systematically left out of a lot of the research efforts in the health area, particularly areas relating to cancer. And so we have done a lot of work to make sure that in medical research and treatment, with heart disease, cancer, AIDS, and other diseases, women are more fully represented in the testing protocols and the research to make sure that we do what we ought to do.

Hillary has launched a national campaign to try to increase the use of mammograms which will help in the early detection and the saving of thousands of lives. And I hope it will be ever more successful.

As you look ahead, I ask you to think about what is the agenda for women and for families, for more than any other people in our society, women have always carried on the struggle to find both personal fulfillment and still fulfill the social obligation of maintaining strong families

and giving our children a better chance. And I think now that's what we want for all Americans.

If you look at the American economy today, the truth is that most people don't have the option not to work. For those who do, I applaud them for any decision they choose to make because the most important thing in our society is still raising children and doing a good job of it. That is still the first and most important job of our society.

But if you look at this world toward which we are moving, the 21st century, the way we work and live is changing dramatically. And we are in a big, huge debate today, not just in Washington but in every State in the country, about how we're going to reestablish common ground, how can we agree on the basic things we have to do to enable our people to succeed, first and foremost, in raising their children, secondly, in being successful in the workplace, and thirdly, in preserving our freedom and our way of life. Those will be the great challenges, the new family values challenges for the 21st century. And we have to ask and answer those questions.

If I might, let me just suggest a few things that I think are quite important if we are going to extol family values and give women a chance to live up to the fullest of their God-given capacities as we move into this next century.

First of all, we've got to say, it is the policy of the United States of America for people to be able to succeed as parents and as workers. It is the policy of the United States for people to be able to succeed. In that sense, perhaps the most important law I've signed since becoming President is the first one, the family and medical leave law. The people—again everybody was for change in general but against it in particular. People got up and gave the awfulest speeches you ever heard about that law. They said it would mean the end of the free enterprise system, businesses would go bankrupt, stores would be boarded up everywhere.

We have no instance, not a single one, of a business going bankrupt because of the family and medical leave law. But there are a whole lot of people out there who can take a little time off from work when their children are sick—sometimes their children are dying—without losing their job. And that's a good thing. There are women who can take time off from work to deal with their own illnesses without

losing their health insurance and thereby losing their ability to work, because of that law. So I think that's a part of our family values agenda.

If you look at the family values agenda, you have to say in the world toward which we are moving the level of education people have determines their income and their capacity to earn more than ever before in American history. So I think giving every child a good start in school and guaranteeing everybody the right to go to college with an affordable college loan, preserving programs like the national service program that allows people to work their way through college, giving every unemployed person in the country the right to what I call a "GI bill" for America's workers, a voucher that they can take to the nearest community college so that they can get retrained when they lose their jobs, these are family value issues that will profoundly affect the women of our country and their ability to do well in the future.

I think immunizing all the children in this country is a pretty important family values issue. I think we ought to keep going until we've got the job done. I think we ought to recognize that, yes, we have to slow the rate of inflation in Medicare and Medicaid, but we shouldn't forget that if we want our working people to be able to educate their children, then we ought not to cut Medicare and Medicaid so much that they will undermine the ability of middle class people to have their parents get the care they need and undermine senior citizens' ability to get that kind of care.

Let me make it clear: I believe balancing the budget is a family values issue. I think it—this year—this year, we would have a surplus in the budget but for the interest run up on the debt accumulated in the 12 years before I showed up in Washington. This is a big issue.

Next year, interest on the debt will be bigger than the defense budget. We're worried about getting an adequate budget for the parks here. We're worried about getting an adequate budget for education. No American has a stake in a permanent deficit. That also is a family values issue; lifting the burden of this awful debt off of our children is a family values issue. But we can do it without breaking Medicare and bankrupting the ability of middle class families to know that their parents can get the health care they need while they educate their children. We can do both, but we must do both. It's not an either-or choice.

I think maintaining what you see behind me is a family values issue, and making it available for all the American people. And I think being willing to honestly confront some of the most difficult conflicts in our society where short-term economic gain will cause a heavy price over the long run is also an important part of our maturing as a country.

And let me just mention one issue, a difficult one. Everybody told me that I—all my political advisers told me I had taken leave of my senses when I said it was time to stop walking away from the terrible health consequences of teenage smoking. But I believe the United States is right to say this is a children's disease. Kids are being addicted, 3,000 kids a day start smoking, 1,000 of them, 1,000 of them, will have their lives shortened as a result of it. I think that is a family values issue, and we should take it and face it together.

So if we're going to do this, it is important that we remember the kind of self-confidence that was demonstrated in Wyoming when women got the right to vote. It is important that men and women, with all their differences, political and otherwise, have the level of self-confidence to sit down and say, America is still a great big family. Like every great big family, there's a whole lot of differences, and there's always going to be a whole lot of argument, and we're always going to be looking at some of our family members cross-eyed, like we do our second cousin that we wish wouldn't show up to the reunion. [*Laughter*] But there are limits to the extent to which we can demonize one another. We've got to treat each other with respect and work through these things.

And if we really want the day when women will become full partners in the decisionmaking process in America—and we believe that's a good thing, and we want to face these issues which will determine whether we go into the 21st century with the American dream alive and well and the American community strong and together—we have got to have that level of self-confidence. We have got to remember that every time, every time we have faced the choice between going forward with freedom or fairness, two things symbolized by women, we have had to deal with the demon of insecurity in our country and even inside.

And we have heard all these proclamations, all these Chicken Little proclamations that every change we make—that we knew we ought to make would cause the sky to fall. And we're still around after almost 220 years because somehow, someday when it came time to make the decision, we decided Chicken Little was wrong.

Blind justice was right; the Statue of Liberty was right; and the kind of self-confidence displayed by the people of Wyoming when they led the world in giving women the right to vote was right. It was right then, and it still is.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 11:30 a.m. at Jackson Lake Lodge on the 75th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th amendment to the Constitution. In his remarks, he referred to Rosemary Shockley, president, League of Women Voters of Wyoming.

Statement on the United States District Court Decision on the Child Support Recovery Act *August 28, 1995*

On July 26, 1995, the United States District Court for the District of Arizona struck down the Child Support Recovery Act as an unconstitutional exercise of congressional power. I respectfully disagree with this decision. I asked the Justice Department to review this case, and the Department has filed a motion asking the court to reconsider its decision.

The Child Support Recovery Act gives us the power to punish deadbeat parents who cross State lines to avoid paying child support. It is essential for Federal law enforcement to have this authority because the States cannot bring these criminals to justice, especially the hardcore group of parents who flagrantly move from State to State to evade their obligations.